**Equality and Equity in Education Finance: A Conceptual Analysis**

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**Abstract** Philosophers and philosophers of education have written extensively on subjects related to the education finance. The purpose of this chapter is to review and critically examine this literature in order to provide a better understanding of how philosophical thinking can advance policymaking in this area. Structured around current philosophical debates, such as equity vs. equality and rival conceptions of the principles of justice, the chapter will aim to highlight key normative issues surrounding education finance. The chapter will also seek, on the one hand, to assess the limits of current philosophical thinking in this area and, on the other hand, to point to the potential contribution that extending philosophical inquiry to new domains can make towards improving education finance.

**Keywords** Philosophy of education, Equity, Equality, Education finance

**9.1 Introduction**

The concepts of equality and equity have both various meanings. The meaning of equality shifts according to what is to be equalized (inputs, outcomes, opportunities, welfare, etc.) and different conceptions of equality can easily conflict ([Warnick, 2015](#_ENREF_38)). The meaning of equity is even more ambiguous as it is often equated with a number of other concepts such as fairness, justice, and merit ([Le Grand, 1991](#_ENREF_21)). Some writers even go as far as to claim that the concept of equity should be abandoned due to lack of agreement on what it is ([Le Grand, 1984](#_ENREF_20)) Naturally, then the relationship between equality and equity is a complex and contested one. According to Espinoza ([2007](#_ENREF_11)) there is a tension between equity and equality and increasing equity can easily lead to lowering equality. In contrast, Ladd ([2008](#_ENREF_19)) closely associates the two terms arguing that what is called in the education finance literature equity is referred to as equality by philosophers. In addition, while Satz ([2007](#_ENREF_33)) opposes equity, which she sees as comparative and based on equality, with adequacy, Minorini and Sugarman ([1999](#_ENREF_25)) write of adequacy based concepts of equity. The terms equity and equality found in the title of this book are, therefore, in need of further clarification and discussion.

The aim of this chapter is to critically examine different conceptions of equity and equality in the context of educational resource allocation. It also seeks to analyze the complex relationship between these two concepts. To achieve these objectives I mainly rely on philosophically oriented literature that address questions of education finance explicitly, but not only on it. I also use non-philosophical literature on education finance as well as philosophical discussions that are not directly related to education finance. Underlying this chapter is a division of equity concepts in education into three types. The first type comprises concepts of equity that are based on equality. The second type comprises concepts of equity that are oriented towards improving the state of the less advantaged but are not committed to equality. The third and final type comprises concepts that are based on other values such merit and need satisfaction. The chapter introduces these three types of equity concepts and their main internal variations. It also analyses the weakness and strength of the different concepts. The chapter argues, however, that the choice of which equity concept to embrace should be linked to a wider discussion of the aims of education.

The article proceeds as follows. Section 9.2 discusses concepts of equity that are based on the notion of equality. Section 9.3 highlight the key shortcomings of embracing equity concepts that are based on equality in general, and equality of educational opportunities in particular. Section 9.4, examines conceptions of equity that are based on the philosophical notions of sufficiency and prioritarianism. Section 9.5 briefly introduces concepts of equity grounded in needs or merits and distinguishes them from those presented in previous sections. The sixth and final section concludes by suggesting that the decision of which equity concept to use should be made in light of our educational aims.

**9.2 Equity as Equality**

Equality, in one of its strongest senses, demands the equalization of outcomes, conditions or results. In education, the concept of equal distribution of outcomes can take various forms. It might mean that all children should do equally well on standardized tests, that they leave the education system equally equipped for the job market, that they enjoy equal levels of well-being and so forth. While it is a useful as an ideal, which can serve as reference point for assessing existing realities, in practice adopting the concept of equal distribution of outcomes raises various difficulties.

One difficulty with embracing equality of outcomes in the educational context is that it is bound to conflict with other significant values. For example, as argued by Gutmann ([1987](#_ENREF_15)), the quest to achieve an equal distribution of outcomes can result in an undesired interference in ways of life that are viewed as hindering it. Another difficulty with equality of outcomes, is that it will tend to collide with maximizing utility or educational productivity ([Howe, 1989](#_ENREF_17)). Obtaining equality of outcomes might lead to excessive investment in the weak, restricting the development of the most talented, or both ([Jencks, 1988](#_ENREF_18)). These measures are, of course, normally inefficient in terms of increasing social utility or productivity. Two additional problems with pursuing equality of outcomes in education are: one, that by trying to bring all students to the same level in one chosen criteria (i.e. test scores) the fact people are different from each other and have different tastes, preferences and desires is ignored; and two, that this concept of equality disregards the importance of responsibility and choice by attempting to bring all students to the same level regardless of what they do and choose ([Phillips, 2004](#_ENREF_29)). The most significant obstacle to embracing equality of outcomes as an educational aim is, however, that in practice it is impossible to achieve it. The differences between people (in backgrounds, innate abilities etc.) are so big, that they could never be fully bridged. Considering all of the above, it is understandable why Berne and Stiefel ([1999](#_ENREF_3)) observe that “Nobody argues that outputs (such as achievement scores or graduations rates) should be the same . . . for all students” (p. 18). Conception of equity that are based on equality of outcomes are, therefore, rare in education finance.

In contrast to concepts of equality of outcomes, other concepts of equality have been popular in school finance and underlie various concepts of equity. Historically, due to significant variations in educational funding between states, districts and schools, the demand to equalize public spending was an important part of the quest to achieve equity ([Minorini & Sugarman, 1999](#_ENREF_25)). Here equity is simply interpreted as insuring that every student receives an equal amounts of public resources. Directly related to this concept of equity is the notion of wealth neutrality. As Berne and Stiefel ([1999](#_ENREF_3)) write: "Wealth neutrality as a school finance equity concept specifies that no relationship should exist between the education of children and the property wealth (or other fiscal capacity) that supports the public funding of education" (p. 16). As argued by Ladd ([2008](#_ENREF_19)), however, equal public spending is limited and will often not translate into equality of inputs. She provides three reasons for this. Firstly, she argues that when public funding is spent evenly, the best teachers, who have the most options open to them, will naturally choose to work with advantaged students thereby increasing inequalities. This is so since when public funding is spent equally teachers do not have an incentive to perform the extra work needed to deal with disadvantaged students ([Ladd, 2008](#_ENREF_19)). Secondly, she maintains that since some parents, who have the resources, will be willing to invest more in their children's education, even if public money is spent equally their children are bound to enjoy greater inputs. Thirdly, she claims that since educational resources have not been spent equally in the past, some schools have an historical advantage, for example by having better infrastructures, and that this relative advantage is kept when resources are spent equally ([Ladd, 2008](#_ENREF_19)). It can be argued, then, that to achieve equity more is needed then just spending public money equally.

What can be seen as an important refinement of the idea that equity requires equal public spending, which indirectly address some of its shortcoming, is the notion of horizontal equity. Horizontal equity demands that equally situated students should be treated equally ([Berne & Stiefel, 1999](#_ENREF_3)). Equality still forms here the basis of equity but the notion of horizontal equity takes into consideration, at least implicitly, the fact that not everyone will equally benefit from equal public spending and that it will therefore not always do. The main challenge here is, of course, to determine who should be viewed as equally situated. In practice, students are normally divided into subgroups and horizontal equity is examined in terms of intra-group equality ([Odden & Picus, 1992](#_ENREF_27)). The notion of horizontal equity, then, can be seen as moving a step closer to securing equality of inputs within groups but does not secure equality between them. Horizontal equity, however, is bound to leave substantial inequalities between groups and is therefore seen as an insufficient ideal by many.

The realization that treating all equally can sustain and even enlarge existing gaps has led to the development of what is known in the school finance literature as vertical equity ([Odden & Picus, 1992](#_ENREF_27)). The driving idea behind vertical equity is that “differently situated children should be treated differently” ([Berne & Stiefel, 1999, p. 20](#_ENREF_3)). In itself, the notion of vertical equity says very little. It raises questions such as different in what way? What does treating differently means? In a framework that places equality as the basis for equity, vertical equity can receive three key interpretations. Firstly, it can mean that we should make sure that all differently situated children should achieve equal educational outcomes and we have already discussed the difficulties involved in embracing this view. Secondly, it can mean that public spending on education should vary in a way that secures equality of educational inputs. Since due to various factors some children enjoy greater educational inputs than others, achieving equality of inputs demands treating different children differently when those who have less resources will receive more and vice versa. The main problem here, however, is that even if equality of educational inputs is achieved, large gaps are likely to remain. Because the ability of children to take advantage of the resources received is influenced by their innate abilities, social background and various other factors, even when getting exactly the same inputs they will end at very different places educationally ([Grubb, 2009](#_ENREF_14)). Finally, vertical equity can be linked to a concept of equal opportunities. In a broad sense, equal opportunity commonly means that people can compete on fair terms and no one enjoys an undeserved advantage or suffers an underserved disadvantage ([Schramme, 2014](#_ENREF_34)). In education, the principle of equality of opportunity has taken numerous forms. In its narrower readings it is simply equated with nondiscrimination, while in its highly demanding ones it is viewed as requiring that students’ educational achievement should be influenced by nothing but their effort (not even their talent) ([Brighouse, 2010](#_ENREF_4)). For the purpose of the current discussion, I will embrace a common view of equality of opportunity according to which educational equality of opportunity means that “An individual’s prospect for educational achievement may be the function of that individual’s talent and effort, but it should not be influenced by her social class background” ([Brighouse, 2010, p. 28](#_ENREF_4)).

Tying vertical equity to equal opportunity helps to deal with some of the difficulties raised by embracing other concepts of equality based equity. On the one hand, it is more comprehensive than the conceptions of equal public spending and equality of inputs and is more likely to reduce gaps. On the other hand, it seems to be not as demanding as the concept of equal outcomes and is less likely to conflict with other values. In addition, it leaves a place for personal responsibility and recognizes that not everyone is the same. Nevertheless, equity concepts based on equality of opportunity are still susceptible to various criticisms. It is to these criticisms that we now turn. Some of these criticisms, it should be noted, focus specifically on equality of opportunity while other apply to concepts of equality in general.

**9.3 Against Equality of Opportunity**

Although the concept of equality of educational opportunities is widely embraced by both educationalists and policymakers, it has not remained uncontested. Perhaps the most significant theoretical challenge to this ideal is found in the argument that equality of opportunity is deceiving when viewed independently of outcomes. Consider, for example, a case in which following their participation in a special training program many disadvantaged students have the opportunity to go to college but in practice none of them chooses to do so. A question is naturally raised here regarding whether achieving equality of opportunity is sufficient and what has been actually accomplished. As argued by Phillips ([2004](#_ENREF_29)) “any systematic disparity in outcomes – whether this be a concentration of certain groups at certain points of the social [or educational] hierarchy or a marked segregation of occupations and roles – alerts us to a likely inequality in initial opportunities” (p. 13). Hence, it is argued that what we should really be concerned about is outcomes not just opportunities. Some even go as far as to claim that in practice concepts of equal opportunities collapses into that of equal results ([Howe, 1989](#_ENREF_17)). The more, however, equality of opportunity is tightly linked to outcomes, the more the problems associated with equality of outcomes, which were already discussed above, reemerge. Most significantly it is hard to imagine how equality of opportunity can be achieved in practice. While unlike equality of outcomes equality of opportunity does not demand that all students produce the same outputs, it still demands that, at least at some point, they could compete on equal terms. Considering the vast differences between people in both innate abilities and socioeconomic backgrounds it is hard to see how it can be done. Moreover, even if theoretically it could be done, it would demand a huge amount of resources that is simply unavailable. As argued by Satz ([2007](#_ENREF_33)) “no society has the resources to supply the same opportunities to poor families as are possible for those with more wealth who value the continued development of their children’s talents” (p. 632).

One way to avoid the difficulties just presented is to achieve equality of opportunity through what is often termed “leveling down”. This means that equality of opportunity is achieved not only by improving the condition of those who have less, but also by restricting or even lowering the advancement of those who have more. The idea that equality can be achieved by leveling down, it is important to note, is applicable for all concept of equality and not just equality of opportunity. For example, equality of inputs or equality of public spending can be achieved by cutting available resources to the point in which everyone has the same as those who have the less of all. From an educational perspective, however, the idea that equality should be achieved by leveling down seems fundamentally flawed since leveling down means that children will not receive benefits they could have received simply because others cannot receive them as well ([Strike, 2008](#_ENREF_36)). Since education does not only have an instrumental value for individuals but also an intrinsic value and a social value, leveling down makes little sense because it can reduce the latter two ([Segall, 2013](#_ENREF_35)). In fact, as argued by Brighouse and Swift ([2008](#_ENREF_5)) leveling down in education can even hurt the weakest members of society because they will not be able to take advantage of the benefits that could have potentially been produced for them if the education of others was not restricted. For example, letting the strongest members of society invest freely in the education of their children could lead to economic development that will benefit its weakest members. In education, then, leveling down is not perceived as a legitimate way to secure equality of opportunity and some even claim that the fact that equality of opportunity could be achieved by leveling down helps to invalidate it as a principle guiding educational allocation ([Satz, 2007](#_ENREF_33)). If, nevertheless, leveling down is not to be used in education then the problem of how to achieve equality of opportunity in practice remains unresolved.

In addition, feasibility is just one of the concerns surrounding the embracement of an equity concept based on equality of opportunity. Equality of opportunity, like equality of outcomes, is likely to clash with other desirable aims, such as increasing utility, as well as with widely embraced values such as freedom and parental partiality ([Brighouse & Swift, 2013](#_ENREF_6)). Moreover, it is sometimes argued that striving to achieve equality has unwanted consequences. For example, Frankfurt ([1987](#_ENREF_13)) maintains that focusing on equality leads people to be over concerned with what others have and under concerned with their own absolute condition and that this is alienating and morally inappropriate. Equality in general and equality of opportunity in particular should not, therefore, be uncritically accepted and a question is raised about why they are so important, especially when they conflict with other values. The scope of this article does not permit to enter the discussion on the moral value of equality but it is important to note that many argue that equality in education is not important in itself (e.g. [White, 1994](#_ENREF_39); [Winch, 1996](#_ENREF_40)). Equality based concepts of equity, it follows have limitations both in terms of feasibility and desirability. Due to these limitations many have suggested alternative concepts of equity that are not based on equality. It is to these that we now turn.

**9.4 Equity as a Concern for the Less Advantaged**

Equality based conceptions of equity are normally promoted in education finance with the aim of bettering the situation of those who enjoy lesser advantages. There are, however, also other distributive principles serving the same aim. Where they differ from conceptions of equality is that unlike them they are not based on the assumption that, in one way or the other, it is “intrinsically bad, or unfair, if some individuals are worse off than others” ([Casal, 2007, p. 296](#_ENREF_8)). One such distributive principle that has become increasingly popular is sufficiency. Underlying the notion of adequacy, the principle of sufficiency is now widely embraced in school finance and litigation ([Baker & Green, 2012](#_ENREF_2)). The basic premise underlying sufficiency is that what really matters “is not that everyone should have the same but that each should have enough” ([Frankfurt, 1987, p. 21](#_ENREF_13)). According to this view, once everyone has enough it does not matter that some have more than others. What matters, then, is not equality but that no one has too little. Surplus finance here is not seen as a problem. When translated into school finance policy the notion of sufficiency demands the establishment of threshold that defines what constitutes a sufficient or adequate education and the primary objective of educational allocations becomes is to bring all students above the established threshold. Like in the case of equality, sufficiency can take various forms and be defined in terms of spending or inputs but most commonly it is measured in terms of outcomes.

While in the literature, for reasons of conceptual clarity and others, equity is sometimes equated with equality and contrasted with adequacy and sufficiency ([Ladd, 2008](#_ENREF_19)), sufficiency can be viewed as an alternative conception of equity because it is concerned with the fair distribution of resources ([Unterhalter, 2009](#_ENREF_37)). In fact, Grubb ([2009](#_ENREF_14)) maintains that adequacy is “a weaker standard of equity” (p. 137), while Baker and Green ([2008](#_ENREF_2)) note that “vertical equity as adequacy is perhaps the most common approach in modern school finance 'adequacy' litigation" (p. 213). We will, therefore, not view here sufficiency and adequacy as comprising a different category but rather view them as offering a competing conception of equity; one that is able to deal with some of the difficulties arising from equality based concepts of equity and particularly those based on equality of opportunity.

In general, concepts of equity that are based on sufficiency tend to be less demanding than those based on equality of opportunity ([Casal, 2007](#_ENREF_8)). They do not demand that spending, achievements or outcomes will be leveled down. This, in turn, reduces potential conflict with other values such as freedom and parental partiality ([White, 1994](#_ENREF_39)). In addition, sufficiency is less prone to conflict with increasing utility. Another respect in which concepts of equity based on sufficiency is less demanding is in terms of resources. While creating equality of opportunity or equality of outcomes without leveling down seems virtually impossible, bringing all children to a certain threshold, including a very high one, appears more feasible. This is true even when the threshold is set in terms of outcomes as it normally is in practice. Moreover, the ability to set the threshold in terms of outcomes permits to overcome the challenges arising from unfulfilled opportunities. Finally, in contrast to conception of equity based on equality, those based of sufficiency are always geared towards improving the absolute conditions of those found beneath the threshold, namely the less advantaged. In light of the above, it becomes clear why conceptions of adequacy and sufficiency have gained currency over the last few decades.

Yet as a guide for educational resources allocation sufficiency based concepts of equity have, of course, their own problems and weaknesses. They give rise to numerous technical issues such as answering what constitutes adequate education. More significantly perhaps, they permit what would normally be regarded as an unfair distribution because what happens above the threshold is viewed as insignificant ([Casal, 2007](#_ENREF_8)). Imagine, for example, a situation in which all have crossed the designated educational threshold. In this situation it should not matter if some people are found just above the threshold while others are way over it enjoying all types of benefits, advantages and opportunities. In theory, as long as everyone is over the threshold and have enough it should not matter. This is true even if those enjoying the privileges receive them only because they were born to a richer family. Somehow this does not seem right. Moreover, the problem of uneven distributions is particularly acute in the case of education ([Brighouse & Swift, 2008](#_ENREF_5)). Education, is at least partly, a positional good, namely the ability to derive benefits from education is not only based on how well one does in it but also on how well one does when compared to others because education is competitive. To illustrate, the ability of one to be admitted to study medicine in the university depends not only on one’s grades but also on the grades of those competing against her for the limited number of places available. The result of education being a positional good, many argue, is that sufficiency is in and off itself an insufficient basis for educational resource allocation that could lead to unjust distributions ([Brighouse & Swift, 2008](#_ENREF_5)).

Another approach to achieve equity by bettering the state of the less advantaged is based on what philosophers have termed prioritarianism ([Broome, 2015](#_ENREF_7)). The basic idea underlying this approach is that “benefiting people matters more the worse of these people are” ([Parfit, 1995, p. 19](#_ENREF_28)). In practice, it means that the less advantaged students should receive more funding, because benefiting them receives greater weight. Although when taken to its logical conclusion prioritarianism does mean that we should actively take from the more advantaged in order to give to the less advantaged because this will produce more overall benefits, it is rarely interpreted in this way and prioritarianism mostly means that when distributing available resources priority is given to those less well off. Prioritarianism, then, is, on the one hand, not as demanding as equality of opportunity or equality of outcomes because it does not aspire to bring all to the same level. On the other hand, prioritarianism goes beyond sufficiency and adequacy because even when all are above the threshold it still matters who has less and who has more. Prioritarianism, in this context can be seen primarily as a way to secure that those who are less advantaged will be compensated. In practice education funding often embraces prioritarian principles by using weighted student funding that gives greater weights to the less advantaged without expecting that this will result in actual equality.

Prioriatanism too can take different forms. Some of those embracing prioritarianism are mostly concerned with how bad people are in absolute terms, while other focus on their relative position ([Fleurbaey, 2015](#_ENREF_12)). One unique version of the prioritarianism that has attracted considerable attention is Rawls’ difference principle ([Parfit, 1995](#_ENREF_28)). According to this principle, inequalities are legitimate only as far as they benefit the least-advantaged members of society ([Rawls, 2001](#_ENREF_30)). This principle shows how priority and equality diverge because while giving priority to those who are worst off it still permits the gaps in society to grow.

As, however, argued by Hausman ([2015](#_ENREF_16)), when prioritarianism is translated into policy recommendations it does not significantly differ from equality based concepts and is therefore susceptible to similar criticisms. Prioritarianism, like the attempt to achieve equality, is bound to lead to an overinvestment in those who are worst off on the expense of others. According to prioritarianism, since those who enjoy less advantages or the worst off (depending on which version of prioritarianism is embraced) receive priority, more and more resources should be invested in their education thereby creating a risk that other social or educational goals will be crowded ([Warnick, 2015](#_ENREF_38)). In fact, ideally the investment in the less advantaged should continue until perfect equality has been achieved and there is no reason to prioritize them. As argued above this is not likely to happen. One way around this difficulty is to argue that priority should be given to the least advantaged until they reach a certain minimum but this brings us back to sufficiency and the problem of positional goods. Another and very significant problem of equity concepts based on prioritarianism, and which it shares with equity concepts based on both equality and sufficiency, is that they all do not adequately deal with questions related to needs and merit. The next section elaborates why and introduces additional concepts of equity.

**9.5 Needs and Merits**

In the education finance literature equity is tightly linked with a concern for those enjoying lesser advantages. In other fields, however, such as social psychology and empirical sociology, equity is associated more closely with needs, merit and desert ([Le Grand, 1991](#_ENREF_21)). Actually, equality and equity are often seen as opposed to each other when equality is identified with providing equal resources regardless of outcomes, inputs or merits while equity is viewed as distributing resources according to them ([Morand & Merriman, 2012](#_ENREF_26)). The gap between conceptions of equity that are geared towards helping the less advantaged and those that are not can be clarified by focusing on the notion of needs which often plays a significant role in both of them.

Conceptions of equity that are geared towards improving the state of the less advantaged often allude to the notion of needs. It is suggested that greater funding should be given to the less advantaged because their educational needs are not adequately met ([Ross & Levacic, 1999](#_ENREF_32)). In policy this view of equity is often expressed in the design of needs based funding formula. Yet in the real world not only the less advantaged have greater educational needs. Consider, for example, the case of the gifted and talented. On the one hand, the gifted and talented have high educational needs, but on the other hand, since they have developed abilities they mostly would not qualify as less advantaged, quite the opposite ([Merry, 2008](#_ENREF_23)). A question then emerges regarding whether equity demands that we provide more educational resources to the gifted and talented. If we view equity in terms of equality, sufficiency or prioritarianism then the answer is no. If we value equality, providing more to the gifted and talented will be rejected because it is bound to produce greater inequalities. If we embrace sufficiency then it will be rejected because the gifted and talented are bound to be above the educational threshold. If we adopt prioritarianism, we have no reason to provide the gifted and talented with extra resources because they are not part of those who should receive priority for being less advantaged. If, on one the other hand, equity is interpreted as simply providing each according to his or hers needs, then we should provide more to the gifted and talented despite the fact that it can, at least indirectly, go against the interest of the less advantaged.

Moreover, a potential conflict between the interest of the less advantaged and equity can arise not only when answering needs is seen as the basis of equity, but also when equity is associated with merit, as it is often the case in education ([Baez, 2006](#_ENREF_1)). Here the key to securing equity is perceived as allocating resources either based on the attributes that individuals possess or according to what they have done. This idea takes various forms but three versions of it are particularly common in education ([Jencks, 1988](#_ENREF_18)). According to the first version, fairness requires that educational resources and opportunities be distributed based on the ability of students to benefit from them ([Meuret, 2002](#_ENREF_24)). It is held that it is inequitable to waist resources on those who cannot benefits form them or benefit only slightly. According to the second version, fairness demands that educational resources and opportunities be distributed based on prior achievements ([Meuret, 2002](#_ENREF_24)). It is maintained that equity demands that those who did better in the past be rewarded. According to the third version, which has gained currency over the last few decades, fairness requires that resources and opportunities will be distributed based on student’s effort ([Roemer, 1998](#_ENREF_31)). It is maintained that an equitable distribution should reflect the individuals’ choices and efforts and not factors that are often beyond one’s control such as innate abilities. Each of these versions offers a different conception of fairness and equity based on merit, but they all depart from the view that equity is primarily about improving the state of the less advantaged and can potentially conflict with this goal.

Concepts of equity based on needs, merit and various other principles are, like those oriented towards improving the state of the less advantaged, open to various criticisms. They raise their own unique difficulties and dilemmas. It has, for example, been argued that the concept of merit helps to preserve social inequalities and injustices ([e.g. Baez, 2006](#_ENREF_1)). It has also been maintained that rewarding according to effort might be problematic because the ability to exert effort is socially constructed ([Roemer, 1998](#_ENREF_31)). In addition, it is held that allocating according to needs is often unfair because our educational needs are not absolute but rather determined by how privileged is the society we live in. The scope of this chapter does not permit to discuss the limitations of all the conception of equity just presented. It does not even permit to provide an exhaustive list of conceptions of equity which do not take improving the state of the less advantaged as their point of departure. The discussion conducted here, however, does help to understand how complicated the conception of equity in education is and how indeterminate it is even in relation to idea that the situation of the less advantaged should be improved.

**9.6 Equity and Educational Aims**

Equity in education, we have seen, has various competing interpretations that do not necessarily go hand in hand. In this chapter different conception of equity were classified into three different types: concepts of equity based on equality, concept that are not committed to equality but do nevertheless see improving the state of those less advantaged as a priority, and concept of equity that are grounded in other values such as fair distribution according to needs or merits. We have also seen that each type of equity based concept has its own weakness as well as advantages and that each concept of equity within them has its own pros and cons. It makes little sense then to reject any of them out of hand and a way should be found to weigh their relative advantages and disadvantages ([Culyer, 2001](#_ENREF_9)). This is especially true since while some conceptions of equity are mutually exclusive, other can complement each other. But how can we decide which one to embrace?

What I would like to argue here is that the choice of which concept of equity to embrace should be guided by and depended upon the educational aims we wish to promote. As argued by Martin ([2015](#_ENREF_22)) the question of educational aims and the question of the allocation of educational resources are often treated and answered separately. The first is guided by a wide set of considerations, while the latter is mainly examined in terms of distributive justice. Principles of justice, however, do not exist in a void and they reflect different priorities and are best suited to serve different values ([Deutsch, 1975](#_ENREF_10)). Deutsch, for example, maintains that if we wish to foster personal development equity should be seen within a framework of answering needs and that if we seek to advance cooperative relations than equity it is best to ground in equality. Deciding, then, which conception of equity to embrace requires us to choose between competing values and these are derived from the educational aims we adopt. If we view education as primarily a tool for securing economic growth than one set of principles should underlie our concept of equity, while if we view education as a tool for increasing social solidarity we should probably embrace another.

Since education has so many possible aims and there are numerous concepts of equity, linking between the two would not be possible within the scope of this chapter. What is suggested here is simply that it might be best to begin the discussion on equity in education by clarifying educational aims. This way, I believe, the choice of which equity concept to embrace will be made easier as we will able to better weigh the advantages and disadvantages of each concept. Moreover, it can also help us further untangle and clarify the complex relationship between equity and equality in education.